

Message Text

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ACTION ORM-02

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 DHA-02 VO-03 SCA-01
H-01 AID-05 INSE-00 L-03 SP-02 CIAE-00 INR-07
NSAE-00 /050 W
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R 241010Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2421
USMISSION GENEVA
INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 5226

EO 11652 GDS
TAGS SREF BR AR US
SUBJECT: ARGENTINE REFUGEES IN BRAZIL

REF: (A) BRASILIA 4955 (B) STATE 130758

SUMMARY: IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFFS JUNE 21, UNHCR LOCAL REP GUY PRIM RECOUNTED DISCUSSIONS THIS WEEK BETWEEN GOB AND UNHCR OFFICIALS ON LOCAL ARGENTINE REFUGEE PROBLEM. GOB REPORTEDLY EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH RECENT THIRD COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT OF ONE-THIRD OF UNHCR CASELOAD (WHICH NOW STANDS AT 100 PERSONS), BUT REITERATED URGENCY OF A COMPLETE RESOLUTION AND NEED FOR LOW-KEY APPROACH. PRIM, IN TURN, REVIEWED FOR US THE RATIONALE FOR QUIET BILATERAL RATHER THAN PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL APPEALS ON BEHALF OF REFUGEES; MENTIONED SIX COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE ACCEPTED ARGENTINES FROM BRAZIL (ADDING OBSERVATION THAT GOB ITSELF WILL AT BEST TAKE A TOKEN NUMBER), AND AGAIN EXPRESSED HOPE THAT USG WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM, THEREBY ENCOURAGING STILL OTHER NTIONS TO DO SO. END SUMMARY.

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1. EMBOFFS MET JUNE 21 WITH UNHCR REP GUY PRIM, AT LATTER'S REQUEST, TO RECEIVE UPDATED BRIEFING ON STATUS OF ARGENTINE REFUGEES IN BRAZIL AND UNHCR EFFORTS ON THEIR BEHALF. IN CONTACTING US, PRIM WAS ALSO REPRESENTING UNHCR LATIN AMERICAN REGIONAL REP MULLER AND UNHCR DIRECTOR FOR PROTECTION YAEGER, WHO THOUGH IN BRASILIA THIS WEEK FOR DISCUSSIONS OF PROBLEM WITH GOB OFFICIALS, HAD DECIDED THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER NOT TO SINGLE OUT AMERICAN

EMBASSY TO PAY A PERSONAL CALL, SINCE THEY WOULD NOT BE VISITING ANY OTHER MISSIONS ON THIS TRIP.

2. SINCE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DEPARTMENT HEAD BAENA SOARES WAS TIED UP WITH ANOTHER MATTER, MULLER AND YAEGER

CONDUCTED THEIR TALKS WITH SOARES' ALTER EGO AND HEAD OF FONMIN'S UN DIVISION MINISTER AZAMBUJA AND WITH THE HEAD OF THE FEDERAL POLICE REGIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR RIO DE JANEIRO. PRIM INDICATED THAT TALKS HAD GONE WELL BY UNHCR'S DEFINITION. GOB HAD EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH UNHCR SUCCESS THUS FAR IN FINDING THIRD COUNTRY HAVENS FOR ONE-THIRD OF REFUGEE CASELOAD, THOUGH IT RETAINS A SENSE OF URGENCY ABOUT THOSE CASES REMAINING. GOB PROVIDED ASSURANCES THAT IT WILL NOT ENGAGE IN REFOULEMENT, AND INDICATED THAT IT WILL INFORM UNHCR OF ANY ARGENTINE REFUGEES COMING TO ITS ATTENTION, AND WILL STEER THEM INTO UNHCR CHANNELS. GOB, HOWEVER, REITERATED ITS POSITION THAT PRIM WORK OUT OF UNDP OFFICES IN RIO RATHER THAN SETTING UP AN INDEPENDENT OFFICE THERE UNDER UNHCR AUSPICES.

3. PRIM HAD PREVIOUSLY CITED TO US GOB DESIRE FOR LOW-KEY APPROACH DUE TO FEARS OF ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT REACTION. ON THIS OCCASION, HE OFFERED AN ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION. GOB DOES NOT WANT UNHCR PRESENCE HERE WELL PUBLICIZED FOR FEAR THAT IT WILL ATTRACT STILL MORE ARGENTINE REFUGEES INTO BRAZIL, THUS AGGRAVATING PROBLEM FROM GOB STANDPOINT. PRIM INDICATED THAT HIS PRESENCE HERE WAS NONETHELESS WELL KNOWN, DUE IN PART TO THE EFFICIENT GRAPEVINE AMONG REFUGEES, CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL, AND THAT HE HAS CONTINUED TO RECEIVE APPLICATIONS FOR REFUGEE STATUS, THE GREAT MAJORITY OF WHICH, HE BELIEVES, HAVE MET OR WILL MEET UNHCR CRITERIA FOR ACCEPTANCE. TOTAL UNHCR CASELOAD AT PRESENT, SUBTRACTING THOSE PERSONS RESETTLED AND ADDING THE MORE RECENT APPLICANTS, IS APPROXIMATELY 100 PERSONS, INCLUDING DEPENDENTS. PRIM REITERATED HIS EARLIER OPINION THAT THIS REPRESENTS TIP OF THE ICEBERG AND THAT TOTAL NUMBER OF BONA FIDE REFUGEES IN BRAZIL, THOUGH IMPOSSIBLE TO ESTIMATE WITH ANY DEGREE OF EXACTITUDE, MIGHT TOTAL 2 OR 3 THOUSAND PERSONS.

4. PRIM REVIEWED THE REASONS FOR HIS DIRECT APPROACHES TO LOCAL EMBASSIES ON BEHALF OF ARGENTINES, AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR A PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL APPEAL, RETRACING THE RATIONALE REPORTED IN REFTTEL (A), AND STRESSING AGAIN THAT QUIET, BILATERAL APPROACHES REFLECTED SPECIFIC REQUEST OF GOB THAT PROBLEM NOT BE TAKEN UP PUBLICLY IN GENEVA. IN VIEW OF THIS, PRIM DOUBTED THAT UNHCR DIRECTORS IN GENEVA WOULD PRESENT USG WITH FORMAL, WRITTEN REQUEST FOR REFUGEE PLACEMENT SLOTS IN NEAR FUTURE, ALTHOUGH THIS POSITION COULD CHANGE SHOULD CASELOAD, AT PRESENT LIMITED, TAKE ON LARGER PROPORTIONS. MORE GENERALLY, IN DISCUSSIONS WITH GOB, UNHCR OFFICIALS POINTED OUT THAT IF CASELOAD INCREASED SUBSTANTIALLY, LOW-KEY APPROACH TO RESOLUTION OF PROBLEM MIGHT HAVE TO BE

ABANDONED. ACCORDING TO RPIM, GOB ACCEPTED THIS.

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5. PRIM STATED THAT SIX COUNTRIES HAVE THUS FAR ACCEPTED ARGENTINE REFUGEES FOR RESETTLEMENT OUT OF BRAZIL: FRANCE, SWITZERLAND, SWEDEN, BELGIUM, MEXICO, AND VENEZUELA. UNHCR IS AWAITING RESPONSES FROM A NUMBER OF OTHERS, MOSTLY IN WESTERN EUROPE, BUT ALSO INCLUDING CUBA. IN REITERATING HIS EARLIER REQUEST THAT USG URGENTLY ACCEPT SOME REFUGEES FOR RESETTLEMENT, PRIM IMPLIED IMPORTANCE OF EVEN LIMITED NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS AS A TOOL FOR BREAKING LOGJAM AND ENCOURAGING POSITIVE RESPONSES FROM OTHERS, PARTICULARLY BRITAIN, NORWAY, AND CANADA. PRIM ASKED THAT, IF CONSISTENT WITH US LEGISLATION, MACHINERY OF ANY PROGRAM, SUCH AS DISPATCH OF INS REP, BE KEPT LIMITED TO PRESERVE LOW PROFILE. EMBOFFS, WHO WERE ESSENTIALLY NONCOMMITTAL IN THE FACE OF PRIM'S REVIEW OF THE RATIONALE FOR BILATERALISM, POINTED OUT THAT US LEGISLATION AND PROCEDURES WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY REQUIRE PRESENCE OF INS REP, SHOULD PROGRAM BE INSTITUTED, BUT THAT THIS COULD BE HANDLED WITHOUT UNDUE PUBLICITY.

6. PRIM INDICATED THAT TENSION AMONG REFUGEES THEMSELVES REMAINS HIGH, AS WELL AS DISILLUSIONMENT OVER THEIR LACK OF ACCEPTANCE BY OTHER COUNTRIES, ALTHOUGH SITUATION HAS EASED SOMEWHAT DUE
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TO THE AFOREMENTIONED GAINS IN RESETTLEMENT. GOB RECENTLY WORKED OUT A QUICK FIX BY WHICH IT EXTENDED FOR 45 DAYS THE LEGAL PRESENCE OF TWO REFUGEES WHOSE MAXIMUM PERMISSIBLE SOJOURN (SIX MONTHS) UNDER TOURIST VISAS HAD EXPIRED. HOWEVER, PRIM INDICATED THAT IN THE FUTURE, UNHCR WILL PROBABLY APPLY FOR PERMANENT VISAS OR ASYLEE STATUS ON BEHALF OF REFUGEES REACHING THAT SIX MONTH LIMIT. WHETHER GOB WILL AGREE TO THIS IS QUITE ANOTHER MATTER. PRIM INDICATED THAT IN THE RECENT DISCUSSIONS, GOB HAD AGREED TO TAKE SOME SPECIAL REFUGEE CASES, BUT WITHOUT STATING NUMBERS. PRIM SUSPECTS GOB, WHICH IN ANY EVENT BEARS NO LEGAL OBLIGATION TO REFUGEES, WILL NOT GO BEYOND TOKENISM.

7. PRIM TOLD US THAT EXPENDITURES ON BEHALF OF THOSE REFUGEES OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED AS SUCH BY UNHCR HAVE BEEN HEAVY, DUE TO HIGH COST OF LIVING IN RIO. PENDING APPROVAL OF THEIR APPLICATIONS FOR STATUS WITH UNHCR, REFUGEES ARE HELPED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. IN SAO PAULO, ACCORDING TO PRIM, ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY CHURCH HAS BEEN EXCELLENT DUE IN PART TO RELATIVELY LIMITED NUMBER OF REFUGEES INVOLVED. IN RIO, CARITAS HAS SUPPORTED THE REFUGEES, BUT CARDINAL SALES RECENTLY DIRECTED THAT "CIVIL SERVANTS" OF HIS ARCHDIOCESE TAKE OVER PART OF BURDEN. PRIM ATTRIBUTED THIS TO GROWING REFUGEE LOAD IN RIO AND TO SALES' CONCERN OVER OFFICIAL REACTION SHOULD CHURCH BECOME TOO CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH REFUGEES. (EMBASSY COMMENT: THE CONTRAST BETWEEN RIO AND SAO PAULO ALSO REFLECTS THE DIFFERENCES IN BASIC ORIENTATION BETWEEN THE LIBERAL, HUMAN RIGHTS ORIENTED ARCHBISHOP OF SAO PAULO, CARDINAL ARNS, AND THE MORE CONSERVATIVE CARDINAL SALES. END EMBASSY COMMENT.)

8. FINALLY, PRIM INDICATED THAT ONE OF PROBLEMS UNHCR HAS ENCOUNTERED IN OBTAINING EUROPEAN ACCEPTANCE OF ARGENTINE REFUGEES IS PREVAILING INCREDULITY THAT GOVERNMENT OF BRAZIL WOULD TOLERATE EVEN SHORT-TERM PRESENCE OF BONA FIDE LEFT-WING REFUGEES; THIS DISBELIEF, HE SAID, REFLECTS FAILURE OF EUROPEANS TO ADEQUATELY

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DISTINGUISH BRAZIL AND ITS GOVERNMENT FROM SEVERAL OTHER SOUTHERN CONE COUNTRIES, NOTABLY ARGENTINA AND CHILE. EMBASSY WOULD ONLY OBSERVE THAT THIS GAP IN GENERAL AND EVEN SOME OFFICIAL PERCEPTIONS IS NOT LIMITED TO EUROPE.

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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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